

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STOCKHOLM 5161

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SW

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON THORBJORN FALLDIN, PROBABLE NEW SWEDISH
PRIME MINISTER

1. THE OPPOSITION VICTORY IN THE SWEDISH ELECTIONS
LEAVES CENTER PARTY LEADER THORBJORN FALLDIN
(PRONOUNCED FELLDEEN) THE PROBABLE SUCCESSOR TO PRIME
MINISTER PALME. AS LEADER OF THE LARGEST NON-
SOCIALIST PARTY, IT WILL BE FALLDIN'S TASK TO FORM
AND LEAD THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

2. FALLDIN IS CONSIDERED PRIMARILY A NATIONALIST,
WITH A PAROCHIAL OUTLOOK ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.
HE IS INTERESTED PRIMARILY IN SWEDISH DOMESTIC POLICY,
PARTICULARLY NUCLEAR ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT,
REGIONAL PLANNING, AND DE-CENTRALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT.
WHILE HIS INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAS GROWN SOME-
WHAT WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS BECOMING PRIME
MINISTER, HE IS KNOWN TO APPROACH ISSUES IN TERMS
OF THEIR IMPACT ON SWEDEN. FOREIGN POLICY IS NOT
CONSIDERED TO BE HIS STRONG POINT, NOR IS ANYONE IN
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THE CENTER PARTY CONSIDERED TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL

AFFAIRS EXPERT. IN GENERAL, FALLDIN SUPPORTS THE SWEDISH POLICY OF NEUTRALITY AND A CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE, THOUGH WITHIN A VERY LOOSE FRAMEWORK WHICH DOES NOT INHIBIT SWEDEN'S COMMERCIAL FREEDOM.

3. FALLDIN COMES FROM A RURAL BACKGROUND, AND IS LARGELY SELF-EDUCATED, NEVER HAVING GONE TO THE UNIVERSITY. HE STILL RUNS A FARM AND MAINTAINS HIS HOME IN THE COUNTRY. HE HAS BEEN IN THE RIKSDAG SINCE 1958, WITH A GAP FROM 1964-67, AND BECAME CENTER PARTY CHAIRMAN IN 1971.

4. FALLDIN HAS A REPUTATION FOR BEING HONEST, STRAIGHTFORWARD AND DELIBERATE. HIS HOMESPUN MANNER AND PATIENT, SOMEWHAT UNSOPHISTICATED APPROACH APPEAR TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON SWEDES. FALLDIN SPEAKS FAIRLY GOOD, IF HALTING, ENGLISH, AND APPARENTLY READS AND UNDERSTANDS MUCH BETTER. HE HAS TAKEN LESSONS IN THE PAST TO IMPROVE IT.

5. FALLDIN HAS THE REPUTATION FOR BEING A STURDY, DEPENDABLE FIGURE, IF NOT OVERLY CULTIVATED AND BRIGHT. HOWEVER, HIS MANNER MAY BE SOMEWHAT DECEIVING. SOCIAL DEMOCRAT SOURCES HAVE TOLD US, FOLLOWING THE ELECTION, THAT FALLDIN RAN A "BRILLIANT" CAMPAIGN AND "OUTSMARTED" HIS OPPONENTS, CLEVERLY BALANCING THE LEFT AND RIGHT WITHIN HIS PARTY TO MAINTAIN THE LARGEST NON-SOCIALIST BLOCK OF VOTERS. HE AND HIS PARTY, TAGGED WITH THEIR RURAL AND "UNSOPHISTICATED" IMAGE, NOW FACE THE TASK OF PROVING THEY CAN UNITE WITH THE OTHER TWO NON-SOCIALIST PARTIES AND PROVIDE THE EXPERTISE NEEDED TO RUN THE COUNTRY. A KEY TEST WILL BE WHETHER FALLDIN CAN ADAPT HIS ANTIPATHY TO NUCLEAR ENERGY TO THE REALITIES OF COALITION GOVERNMENT WITHOUT EITHER ALIENATING HIS SUPPORTERS OR CAUSING THE NEW GOVERNMENT TO FAIL.

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